

To: The Appropriations Committee

Concerning: The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Budget

I am writing specifically about the State Parks Budget. I am a retired state employee that worked for the Connecticut State Parks for over 35 years. During that time I witnessed many Connecticut residents enjoying both the more intensively used parks' and forests' designated picnic sites, swimming areas, campgrounds, etc as well as the less developed areas such as the miles of hiking trails. While I always sensed the importance of available outdoor recreation areas such as our State Parks and Forests offer to Connecticut's residents, Gina McCarthy, a former Department of Environmental Protection commissioner, repeatedly drove home the point that people that get outdoors are healthier people and that families that get outdoors together are healthier families. Connecticut State Parks and Forests are uniquely able to provide the opportunity for healthy outdoor recreation as the State Parks and Forests are spread out across the State and have the size and diversity of recreation opportunities needed. While there are no plans to technically close any of the State Parks and Forests, if the toilets are not cleaned, the litter not picked up, grill and fireplace ashes not picked up, lawn areas not mowed, etc., the parks and forests well not serve the purpose of providing safe and healthy outdoor recreation opportunities for Connecticut's residents. I know the budget situation is dire and a dollar not cut here is a dollar that is cut somewhere else. I would hope that you would consider instituting a five dollar per year add on to the vehicle registration fee in exchange for allowing those vehicles with Connecticut license plates free access into the parks. This would save those Connecticut residents that purchased a season pass \$62.00 a year. One visit to a shoreline park on a weekday or an inland park on a weekend costs \$9.00; that is \$4.00 more than the registration fee add on. I am over 65 years old and have a Charter Oak pass that allows me free entry into Connecticut State Parks and I have two registered vehicles. This fee increase would cost me an additional ten dollars a year. Knowing that our State Parks and Forests will remain both open and inviting to Connecticut residents makes this fee well worth it. Regardless of whether there is a five dollar add on to the Connecticut vehicle registration or not, I would like you to know that keeping our State Parks and Forests open, safe and inviting is more important than just providing a place for people to grill a hamburger.

Thank you,
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